TheVillage

www.villageonline.co.uk

Issue #242 March 2024

NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

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TheVillage Issue 242 March 2024

inside

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Front cover: Aelfgythe Morris dancers celebrate their wassail. Picture by Keith Woolford

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Springing bright: The Rev Gail Rogers welcomes visitors to St Leonard's Church, Beoley, during the annual Snowdrop Weekend, which included a children's art exhibition, tea and cake. *Picture/**Keith Woolford***

BIG BUS IDEAS REQUEST

INDEPENDENT district councillors are aiming to solve the public transport riddle affecting village areas.

Lack of a convenient way to travel to work and school is one of the biggest problems villagers raise with councillors, but despite a number of attempts over the past few years no solution has been found.

Now councillors Alan Bailes, Charlie Hotham and Rachael Bailes are inviting residents to tell them about their views for transport within the area.

They want to find out about the various modes of transportation residents currently use and understand their specific requirements.

They would also like to hear about any challenges or obstacles faced in accessing reliable and convenient transport provision.

The results of the survey will give the necessary information to help assess residents' requirements, rather than assume or guess the need, and will be used to inform future decisions.

A six-month trial of a community bus service was introduced in 2022. This ran initially on two days a week, picking up passengers from around the Alvechurch parish in the morning for a Redditch drop-off, then coming back in the afternoon, with bespoke trips around the parish in between.

If successful, it could have been expanded to more than two days a week, but despite "use it or lose it" pleas, it didn't attract sufficient use even for two days and was cancelled at the end of the trial.

The current survey also covers the Alvechurch parish area and is supported by Bromsgrove District Council.

"In addition, we are fully engaged with the parish council and Worcestershire County Council, who are both supportive of our initiative," said Coun Alan Bailes.

"What happens next in terms of transport provision depends upon the outcomes of the survey.

"Rest assured we are fighting for a better transport provision for the area," Coun Bailes added.

To complete the survey online use the QR code below or follow the link at: www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/AlvechurchTransportSurveySpring2024/

The survey can also be completed via paper copies which will be available at Alvechurch Library, The Lounge, Alvechurch Parish Council offices, Alvechurch Dental practice and the Community Larder.

Coun Bailes said the survey should take no more than a few minutes to complete and will close on Monday April 15 2024.

The Baron of Barnt Green!

A NEW life peer has chosen Barnt Green as his territorial title in recognition of his love for the village.

Charles Banner, a leading planning and environmental barrister, is to be introduced to the House of Lords this month after being nominated for a peerage by the Prime Minster.

His official title will be Lord Banner KC, with the territorial designation "of Barnt Green in the County of Worcestershire".

He told *The Village*: "I chose Barnt Green as it is my much-loved home village, where I grew up and where my mother still lives."

HIs mother, Rachel, is well-known around Barnt Green and is a former parish councillor.

She said: "I am so proud. Charles has worked very hard and he now wants to give something back."

He will be sworn in as Lord Banner KC on March 18, following another local boy into the Lords.

Digby Jones, a lawyer turned business and trade advocate who grew up in Alvechurch, was gazetted as a peer in 2007 as "Baron Jones of Birmingham, of Alvechurch and of Bromsgrove in the County of Worcestershire". He retired from the Lords in 2020.

A shed-load

A MEN IN SHEDS initiative was boosted by the large turn-out at a first meeting to gauge interest.

Alvechurch parish councillor Keith Wiseman said: " We thought if we got four or five we'd be very happy - in the end we had 14, which we were very pleased with. We had some lively conversations about what they would like to do."

Coun Wiseman said there were a number of potential locations for a group to use, adding: "It is down to them what they want to do. At the moment it is all quite positive."

On the towpath: Bromsgrove Lib-Dem councillors.

Canal cash plea

BROMSGROVE'S LIB-DEMS are warning that the village canal system is under threat from a halving in public funding.

They proposed a district council motion calling on the Government to rethink the cuts, but failed to win the support of other parties.

Coun David Nicholl said: "A reduction in funding for the Canal and River Trust could threaten the future of our canals, such as the Tardebigge locks, the longest continuous flight of locks in the UK."

Battle of the Santas and planters . . . 2

A PARISH council has relaunched its light-hearted "battle of the Santas and planters" with a neighbouring parish after coming second last year.

Barnt Green councillors agreed that their multi-tiered planters in the high street were not quite the cascade of colour achieved by those on display in Alvechurch.

And as for the Santas, the fact Barnt Green parish councillor Charlie Hotham had to buy and don a Father Christmas suit at the last minute was described by parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley as "a debacle".

Hearing that the floral displays this year will be what they expect, councillors agreed to try again.

And they have high hopes for Christmas having already booked the services of an experienced Santa in return for a £50 donation to the Air Ambulance charity.

Baby alarm

POLICE officers rushed to a village rail station after receiving a report of an abandoned child.

But when they arrived on the platform at Barnt Green, the "child" turned out to be a doll, parish councillors heard.

"If you thought it was a child, surely you would go and have a look," Coun Charlie Hotham commented.

Lickey gate shock

LICKEY HILLS rangers suspect a visitor damaged electrical wiring at a car park gate after becoming locked in, leaving it live to the touch.

The state of the barrier on Warren Lane was discovered when a ranger noticed smoke coming from the ground by the barrier touched it and received a mild electric shock.

The area was sealed off while the fire service identified and rectified the problem.

According to the Lickey Hills Society, the rangers suspect that someone who had found themselves locked in to the car park for the night had tried to remove the gate post and in so doing, damaged the electric cable.

D-Day planning

ALVECHURCH Parish Council has agreed to put £500 towards plans to mark the 80th anniversary of the D-Day Normandy landings that began the liberation of western Europe from Nazi Germany on June 6 1944.

Coun Brett Shepherd said national commemorations would begin with the reading of a proclamation at 8am, followed by beacon lightings across the country in the evening.

Initial discussions were looking at an event on the Meadows, possibly in conjunction with the cricket club.

New ideas for nature reserve

WHEN Hopwood Park motorway service station was being built 25 years ago, one of its main selling points to the village community was the creation of a 35-acre nature reserve behind the site.

The general manager at the time, Neil Austin, told *The VIllage*: "I think it will enrich the whole area."

Welcome Break fulfilled the promise and the reserve was created, with input from Worcestershire Wildlife Trust on planting and fencing installation and initial maintenance.

Records are now sketchy, but the trust believes a draft management plan was produced in 2009 for Bromsgrove District Council, which was to continue the maintenance, but they have no further information since then.

Now there are moves to put the reserve on the map after Hopwood district councillor Charlie Hotham received a positive reponse from the National Trust when suggesting it could form part of their 8 Hills Park project for this area.

But first the current owner needs to be contacted. Coun Hotham has tracked down the company he believes owns the site to Jersey, but has so far not received a response and has passed the details to the National Trust.

Meanwhile, nature has been getting on with it and the site has been maturing. At the same time, the pathways are still used by enough people, possibly by motorists taking a break from the motorway as was originally intended, to be easily followed.

In use: One of the walkways through the nature reserve.

Calagate: What is going on?

FRUSTRATION is growing over the lack of action to enforce access to public open space on a village housing estate.

In the long-running saga now known as Calagate, housing developer CALA Homes was issued with breach of condition notice to install a pedestrian access gate to the land on the Foxhills estate, off Fiery Hill Road, Barnt Green.

When the gate was eventually installed last December, it had a keypad making it only accessible to those with the code.

District and parish councillor Charlie Hotham, who has been pursuing the matter with Bromsgrove's planning department, told parish councillors he had been unable to obtain any further information.

"I have followed up on Calagate and the officers have not responded yet. I can only think that when we served the notice it must have been flawed in some way, but I have had no feedback from officers."

Coun Hotham revealed there were moves within the district council to reduce information to councillors about enforcement notices. "It is all to do with GDPR and what a councillor should and should not know," he explained. "I don't think that is acceptable and it would be very, very bad."

PINNIES AT the ready! (from the left) Emma Westwood, Naomi Pauley and Janet Millward enjoy the new kitchen at Blackwell Community Hall.

The unveiling of the new £20,000 commercial kitchen, is the next big step forward for the community project.

The development, paid for by the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund, comes just two years after the century old building was entrusted to the village community by the Methodist Church and refurbished by volunteers. Hall committee chair Terry Pauley said he was delighted with how the work had turned out.

"The hall's been a venue available to hire for a while but it had an atrociously bad kitchen," he explained. "Now people can come in and properly cook – so we finally have the complete package."

■ Information on bookings and availability can be checked at blackwellcommunityhall.co.uk

Barnt Green parish councillors are also increasingly concerned that they have not even been given a date for the installation of long-promised passenger lifts at the rail station.

Parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley said: "We aren't getting anywhere, it is ridiculous. It has been nine months and we have heard nothing. We have got to find out what is going on. Network Rail have said they are committed to the installation, but they have not said in which year.

"I wrote in a personal capacity. If they don't reply in the next three or so weeks, I may submit a Freedom of Information request," he added.

■ Barnt Green Parish Council agreed to respond to the Boundary Commission proposal to include their parish in a new county division of Alvechurch, with two county councillors. They fear it could be "messy and bureaucratic", especially if the councillors were from different political parties.

Decisions keep Beoley Green Belt intact

BEOLEY parish has seen three major planning decisions made to protect the Green Belt over the past month.

In the largest, Bromsgrove District Council's planning committee rejected a retrospective application by food storage and distribution firm Oakland International to retain five large buildings with a total floor space of more than 4,000 square metres.

In refusing the application, councillors agreed with the planning officer – and a submission from Beoley Parish Council – that the buildings caused harm to the Green Belt.

Bromsgrove planners also refused a revised application from Dominion Racing Stables in Portway for a 400 metre tarmac "access track" across Green Belt fields as causing "harm to the character of the local area diluting the verdant rural qualities of the pasture".

In a third raft of decisions relating to residential developments at a property known as Parklands House, in Brockhill Lane, Beoley, five appeals over refusal of retrospective planning permission were decided by an inspector.

The result means Bromsgrove District Council will be ordering the demolition and removal of a number of buildings and an extension at the property.

20 From The Village archive Years Ago

YES, IT'S the same cover image as in last month's archive . . . that's because we had a joint February/March issue in 2004. Luckily there were plenty of things happening in the area, so we've got some more old stories to share!

IN THE NEWS: Organisers of the annual Alvechurch Alight festival were considering taking a year's break, amid concerns that the event was becoming "samey" and attracting too many people from outside the area. However, they planned to gauge public opinion before a decision was made, and *The Village* invited readers to write in with their thoughts.

ALVECHURCH WELCOMED a new parish clerk, Bobbie Osborne (above right, receiving the parish office key from out-going clerk Gill Lungley). Village resident Bobbie said she was looking forward to the challenge of the position.

PUPILS AT Linthurst First School (now called Blackwell First School) were enjoying outdoor learning in their Forest School, then a relatively new concept in the UK. Pictured are Heather Cooper and Josh Kirby helping to saw firewood.

10 From The Village archive Years Ago

OUR MARCH 2014 cover was perhaps the most bonkers we have run over the past 25 years. It featured the Kings Norton Rhinos rugy club mascot tethered against the storms that had been battering the fields around Hopwood, where the club is based. In hindsight, it looks like he had been celebrating a little too much!

AFTER YEARS of suffering countless lorries thundering past their homes to overtip one million tonnes of spoil in the Lickey foothills at Marlbrook Tip, villagers were astounded to hear at a public meeting that a pond (above) created on the tip was now a "reservoir" and Bromsgrove District Council had been trumped by the Environment Agency over the future of the site.

This included the possibility of six more months of lorries to bring stabilising material on to the site. County councillor Peter McDonald said the Environment Agency was "being used as a smokescreen by the district council".

A LORRY carrying 26 tons of wood got stuck on the canal bridge on Callow Hill Road, Alvechurch, causing police to close the road. After initial recovery attempts failed, a larger vehicle was summoned to rescue the truck, which had its back wheels jammed in the ditch and was threatening to tip over. Villagers had complained about heavy lorries using this route.

Cofton Hackett Parish Council

Parish Council News: March 2024

Bromsgrove Men in Sheds supports Cofton Hackett Parish Council biodiversity initiative

Bromsgrove Men in Sheds have undertaken a commission to build bird boxes and wildlife hides for Cofton Hackett Parish Council's new biodiversity initiative.

The Men in Sheds employed their craftsmanship and design skills to provide the boxes for the council's rewilding project. The community scheme is being developed in collaboration with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and the St Michael's Church eco-group, making use of a small area of woodland owned by the council.

Volunteers from the community are helping to design and build the site which, once completed, will be accessible for local primary schools to visit and for managed access to the wider community.

The project was inspired by suggestions from local residents, including Keith Duncan, who arranged for the Men in Sheds to undertake the work. Cllr Sam Chatterley said, "The Parish Council is grateful to the Bromsgrove Men in Sheds for supporting this worthwhile community initiative and we are really pleased with the fantastic wildlife boxes they have produced for us."

If you are interested in volunteering to support the biodiversity scheme please contact the Clerk at Cofton Hackett Parish Council.

Above: Cllr Sam Chatterley (right) with volunteers from Bromsgrove men-in-sheds.

Traffic Safety in Cofton Hackett

In November, the Parish Council purchased three Vehicle Activated Speed (VAS) Signs which, in partnership with Worcestershire Highways department, have been installed on the major roads in our Parish. These signs indicate the speed which drivers are travelling at, and flash a warning if this speed is above the limit.

The new signs have proven to be effective in educating drivers as to their speed and lowering the average speed of traffic. Data collected from each of the signs makes interesting reading:

Groveley Lane VAS

- Average number of vehicles per day (in both directions): 5,002
- Average speed approaching the VAS: 27.89mph (30.34mph in the other direction)
- 95.27% of vehicles travelling at or below 35mph
- 85th percentile approaching the VAS: 31mph (34mph in the other direction) *

Barnt Green Road VAS

- Average number of vehicles per day (in both directions): 9,644
- Average speed approaching the VAS: 28.21mph (30.44mph in the other direction)
- 94.31% of vehicles travelling at or below 35mph
- 85th percentile approaching the VAS: 31mph (34mph in the other direction) *

Kendal End Road VAS

(Please note that in the coming weeks this sign will be turned in the opposite direction to inform drivers of their speed travelling north rather than south, as it does now)

- Average number of vehicles per day (in both directions): 9,426
- Average speed approaching the VAS: 30.91mph (29.67mph in the other direction)
- 87.59% of vehicles travelling at or below 35mph
- 85th percentile approaching the VAS – 34mph (34mph in the other direction) *

** The 85th percentile speed is the speed at or below which 85 percent of the drivers travel on a road segment. Motorists traveling above the 85th percentile speed are considered to be exceeding the safe and reasonable speed for road and traffic conditions.*

Traffic safety remains high on the Parish Council's agenda with increased police presence and mobile speed checks. The council also seeks volunteers to assist in a Community Speed Awareness campaign.

Please contact the Clerk if you would like more information.

Council meetings

The Parish Council meets on the third Monday of every month (excluding August) at the New Village Hall. Members of the public are welcome to attend all meetings to raise any important issues or just to see what's happening in the Parish.

Contact the Clerk

Email:
clerk@coftonhackettparishcouncil.gov.uk
Telephone: 07496 979153

Any views and opinions on this page are those of Cofton Hackett Parish Council.

Hop on board in Cofton

A Cofton Hackett care home is opening its doors to the community this Easter and inviting local families and children to 'hop on board' for a magical ride, and a day of spring fun for all in its beautiful grounds.

COFTON Park Manor, is inviting children from the local community to join them this Spring for a free Easter egg hunt and magical train ride through its beautiful gardens.

The Cofton Park Manor Express will take visiting youngsters on a tour of the gardens of the luxury care home which will be filled with delicious chocolate treats.

Cofton Park Manor Regional Community Relations Lead Wendy Sibley said: "We cannot wait for this incredible event! Our wonderful grounds will be filled with chocolate eggs for the youngsters to find, and although the train is for children only, this is a family event with plenty going on for everyone.

"Here at Cofton Park Manor we are really looking forward to inviting people to our beautiful home, and getting spring off to a wonderful start."

This free event, which will be held on 29th March from 10am – 3pm is open to all – to confirm your places, contact their friendly team today

Join in an Easter egg hunt, when you visit us this Easter. *Image: Shutterstock*

A place to call home: Where residents can live the life they want.

ABOUT COFTON PARK MANOR

Cofton Park Manor is a luxury care home offering residential, dementia and nursing care, as well as short breaks for the older community.

Part of Hamberley Care Homes, who were named Residential Care Provider of the Year in 2022 in recognition of their groundbreaking approach, Cofton Park Manor enjoys a thriving community, complete with an in-house wellbeing and beauty salon, a deluxe cinema, and a lively café where residents and families enjoy spending time together over a slice of homemade cake.

Aside from its unrivalled environment and exceptional care, what really sets Cofton Park Manor apart is its dedication to ensuring that people can live the life they choose – the warm and caring team – known as Homemakers - encourage and support everyone, going out of their way to help people to embrace and enjoy life.

Whether that's taking up a new hobby, exploring the community, or sitting down to watch a classic film in comfort in the cinema, Cofton Park Manor is a wonderful place to call home.

To find out more about life at this luxury care home, book your tour with their friendly team today on 01213 872722 or email Wendy.Sibley@hamberleycarehomes.co.uk

Cofton Park Manor | 466 Lickey Road | Cofton Hackett | B45 8UU

BRING ON A BYPASS

Dear Editor – The February issue of *The Village* covered a proposed speed reduction in Bordesley.

As it is, during the morning rush hours it is hard to leave driveways as very often there seems to be a continuous flow of traffic on Birmingham Road in both directions.

If the speed limit is lowered, it might make it even harder to join the traffic on Birmingham Road.

I feel that the main issue is not the speed of the cars travelling through Bordesley but rather the volume of traffic, which is high and too excessive for this road, as well as the ever-increasing volume of HGVs travelling between Redditch and the M42.

I think the efforts should be concentrated on the Bordesley bypass and a complete replacement of the surface of Birmingham Road as in places there seems to be more patches from utilities work than original tarmac.

Alex, Bordesley

Applications for BarntChurch

Dear Editor – In the past, letters have touched on the thorny subject of proposals for development on greenfield land, which has led to the term "BarntChuch" being coined.

Approaching Redditch from the Bordesley junction if you glance to the right, you may see a real probability of more development towards Alvechurch, east of the railway line.

Residents concerns will not be eased by the announcement that the government intends to throw £200 million at "Development of the West Midlands", which just might make planning applications sail through the system very easily .

Peter McHugh
Alvechurch

A festive thanks to villagers

Dear Editor – Our services at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green, and St Michael's Church, Cofton Hackett, over the Christmas period were attended overall by nearly 700 people from our villages.

Their generosity enabled just over £2,500 to be collected and donated to Birmingham City Mission, which at Christmas, was providing meals, shelter and support for the growing number of homeless and hungry people in the city.

On their behalf we wish to say a big thank you to all who joined us at the services and who gave generously to support this cause.

The need to support food banks and other charities providing help to the needy is sadly as great as ever. Our churches collect for both BCM and the B30 Food Bank based in Cotteridge.

Other similar schemes also exist in the Bromsgrove/Rubery areas, and we would encourage those who can to see how you can assist either financially, by food donations or by getting involved directly.

Geoff Hall,
Churchwarden at St Andrew's,
Barnt Green and St Michael's,
Cofton Hackett

Have your say . . . about anything!

email: editor@villageonline.co.uk

Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication.
We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.
The deadline for the next issue is March 10th 2024.

WHERE'S VINNY?

ST ANDREWS FIRST SCHOOL pupil Lucy Bannister, aged eight from Lickey shows off the Mini Vinny she won for finding the little creature in February's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village* magazine.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email – see details on bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on March 7 2024. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

Volunteering at The Lounge

Dear Editor – Volunteering can offer many rewards and make a positive difference to people's lives. It can improve confidence and wellbeing, as well as help people gain invaluable work experience and develop new skills.

This has certainly been the case for Anna Wilson (pictured above). Anna initially joined The Lounge volunteering team through a supported internship programme with Mencap and helped out in the café assisted by a support worker.

Anna gained confidence in the tasks required and over a period of time, her Mencap support was phased out. She now volunteers independently one full day a week in the cafe and has learnt many new skills.

Anna's favourite jobs are chatting to the customers, wrapping cutlery and re stocking the drinks fridge and she is always happy to help in anyway she can.

Anna always has a smile on her face, and it has been great to watch her confidence develop.

We offer many different volunteering opportunities, including Duke of Edinburgh placements, facilitating sessions at our Friendship Matters and Youth groups, or by joining our management committee.

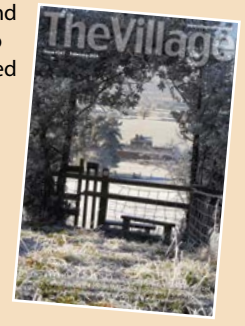
If you would like to know any more about volunteering with us, or feel you have skills to share that would benefit our community projects, please get in touch at manager@alvechurchlounge.org.uk or drop into the café.

Sarah James,
The Lounge, Alvechurch

Abandon all hope

Dear Editor – I had a moment of delight when I saw the cover of the February edition of *The Village* magazine (above, right).

This I hoped, in vain, was the new pedestrian and dog access to the designated public right of way to the CALA Homes estate.



The dream quickly vanished, however, and I realised that this rural-type access would not really be suitable for what I regard as a suburban development.

The main point, however, is that this saga is so typical of the total legal, bureaucratic and toothless public services, and comes within the realm of speed control, and the lifts at Barnt Green station, to name but a few.

If Britain was not broken, the local authority would have ripped out the existing gates, replaced them with something more appropriate and charged CALA Homes accordingly.

Suggested sign: "Abandon hope all ye that cannot enter here".

David Barton, Weatheroak

ALL HAIL THE WASSAIL

VILLAGE Morris side Aelfgythe recently held their mid-winter Wassail, a tradition we've seen making a comeback in recent years.

The wassail includes dancing, shouting and chanting to ward off evil spirts and hanging cider-dipped toast in trees as an offering to bless the next season's harvest.

Despite occasional showers and drizzle, a large crowd gathered in Withybed Green to start the celebrations outside The Crown Inn.

Dancing from Aelfgythe and guest Morris sides including Nancy Butterfly, Plum Jerkum, Ragged Oak and the Alvechurch Morris Men entertained the crowd, who packed in tightly to watch.

The torch procession then made its way through Alvechurch to the beat of drums and music to The Weighbridge.

Once at The Weighbridge, even more villagers joined the wassail to enjoy another round of Morris dancing, singing from Alvechurch Community Choir, poems and the traditional dressing of the tree. The musketeer group, The Sealed Knot, made some noise, firing their muskets on the pub's field.

Members of the Aelfgythe and the crowd declared the event a success, which seemed evident from the merriment of all of the wassail-ers, enjoying their drinks and the festivities.

The only question now, is as it grows in popularity, will it become too big a beast for the village to manage?

Drink-hail: Aelfgythe Morris ladies celebrate a successful wassail.

Accompanying Aelfgythe: An impressive instrument.

The Green Man watches over the celebrations.

The dressing of the tree: Toast is hung as offerings.

Silver smiles: Aelfgythe's vibrant silver faces light up the wassail.

A view from above: Nancy Butterfly Women's Dancers put on a show.

Clockwise from above: Hankies are brought out and waved at the crowd. Wassail-ers hold up their torches. Ragged Oak smash their sticks. Morris sides mingling. The Green Man leads the procession to The Weighbridge. The crowd grows outside The Crown. The Sealed Knot make some noise. Aelfgythe wave their bright red hankies at photographer Keith Woolford.

Mother's Day treats

ARE you celebrating Mother's Day? Whether you like to make a big deal of your mum/wife/nan/dad on Mother's Day or prefer to treat her throughout the year, you'll find plenty of ways to make the ladies in your life feel special right on your doorstep.

Here are some ideas to help you make Mother's Day special:

- Book a relaxing massage or facial at one of the wonderful village salons.
- Pre-pay for their next haircut. It's not an immediate gift but if you know their favourite places to be pampered, a voucher or pre-payment is a great choice.
- Go for a walk! Get some fresh air, take some sandwiches and a flask of tea (or maybe a bottle of bubbly?) and walk in our beautiful countryside.
- Book a table at one of the local pubs.
- There are lots of great local photographers in the area, and what better gift than to get some pictures with Mum who is often the one behind the camera. Get a voucher for a photoshoot.
- Cake... need we say more? Check out a local cake maker and see if they are doing any special Mother's Day treats.

And, if you had forgotten that Mother's Day is coming up (it's 10 March by the way), then you're very welcome for the reminder!

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Menstruation myth-busting

VHK WOMENS HEALTH

Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs, from **VHK Women's Health Clinic**, explain what happens to menstrual cycles as we age, and how they can help you manage the fluctuations in your cycle.

Meet the team: Dr Heidi Kerr (left) and Dr Vicky Hobbs are experienced clinicians who specialise in women's health.

THERE is a common misconception that as women head towards menopause their periods will get lighter and then one day just stop and whist this may be true for a small cohort of women, for most women the journey towards the cessation of periods is not this smooth.

During the peak of reproductive life many women will have a regular cycle anywhere between 21 and 35 days, but perimenopause can bring with it heavier, more frequent periods and a new irregularity not experienced since early teenage life when periods first started.

One in five women experiences heavier periods in the run up to menopause and this can be associated with flooding, pain and significant impact on quality of life.

One of the most stressful aspects can be the uncertainty of when a period may come and the fear of flooding through clothing when at work or out doing activities or exercise.

The reason for the change to cycle length and pattern is usually related to the ovaries not regularly releasing an egg each month (ovulation) and these anovulatory cycles and fluctuating hormone levels then impacts on a woman's periods which are driven by the hormonal changes throughout the menstrual cycle.

Women are also more prone to developing fibroids (benign growths within the uterus that can cause very heavy periods) in their 40's and these can also be a cause of flooding and very heavy periods.

It is important for women to understand that there are treatment options to help with these period changes especially if there is impact on quality of life and this may be either purely period focused or as part of wider support for peri-menopausal symptoms.

This may just be oral medication to take when on a period to reduce flow, the use of a contraceptive pill which can reduce both flow and frequency of periods or in the form of a hormonal intrauterine system called a Mirena coil – that releases progesterone directly into the womb, thinning the lining and significantly reducing menstrual loss. This can also be used as the progesterone part of an HRT regime, and for contraception so can be particularly useful for peri-menopausal women with multiple needs.

Dr Vicky Hobbs and Dr Heidi Kerr are Women's Health experts. They are qualified GPs, menopause experts and fit Mirena coils in their private clinic in Bromsgrove.

VHK Women's Health Clinic offers appointments for women, giving time and expertise to women to explore symptoms and create and deliver bespoke treatment plans.

They offer:

- All forms of HRT
- Testosterone prescribing and monitoring
- Management of heavy, painful periods and Mirena coil insertions
- Treatment of pre-menstrual symptoms and perimenopause

For so many women with problematic periods there is an expectation that they will quietly tolerate them, but women should always feel confident to seek help, and be offered a range of treatment options to find the best treatment for them as an individual.

Vicky and Heidi are passionate about supporting women to find the best treatment for them so please see their website for more information.

At VHK Women's Health Clinic we can assess and advise on all aspects of women's health including peri-menopause and menopause care. They have appointments available, which can be booked at www.vhkwomenshealth.com

A murder in the village!

ALVECHURCH Dramatic Society's latest production, *Murder on the Nile*, adapted from the novel by Agatha Christie, premieres in April at Alvechurch Village Hall.

Join in, as the cast board the Nile steamer "Lotus" and set sail on a glamorous voyage. . .

Kay Ridgeway has led a charmed life with money and good looks, and she embarks on a honeymoon with her new husband. But fatal circumstances await when the idyllic surroundings are shattered by a shocking and brutal murder. Under scrutiny are a multitude of memorable passengers, all with a reason to kill. The tension and claustrophobia builds, as a shocking and audacious conspiracy is laid bare.

This classic Agatha Christie thriller is full of twists and turns to keep you guessing until the end.

Tickets are £9, with £8 concessions. Tickets are available from The Lounge, Alvechurch or phoning/ texting 07977 140088. You can also email ads.alvechurch@gmail.com

Access for all

ALVECHURCH Community Larder's committee has taken steps to become more user-friendly, and more accessible online. A spokesperson for the Larder said: "We are aware that people use websites and Facebook as a major means of communication. The Larder also needs to pass on information about the tremendous community activities we carry out."

Luckily for the Larder, they have links with a professional web designer who has given us them an eye-catching new design.

The Larder now has their own telephone number and email address to make contacting the Larder much easier.

Maurice Smith, a management committee member will answer the answer-phone messages and emails. No question is too small, whether you'd like to know opening times or are hoping to volunteer, all questions are welcome.

The Larder Facebook page will be updated regularly, keeping everyone aware of their upcoming events and activities.

Search Alvechurch Community Larder on Facebook

Sinfonia sounds

PROBABLY one of the best kept secrets in Alvechurch is their very own professional classical orchestra, *writes Keith Woolford*.

The Midland Sinfonia now performs its concerts throughout the year in The Ark, a decision recently made by the groups' trustees.

Previously held in St Laurence church, The Ark provides a more intimate (and warmer) venue for the concerts, and the acoustics in the hall also accommodate and enhance the experience for all.

Their first concert of 2024 entitled *The Hills are Alive* took place in February, and included pieces around the theme of peaks and hills.

An undeniable success: Members of the orchestra receive a resounding round of applause.

The first half of the concert included the *Sound of Music* medley, a piece by Holst and Mussorgsky's *Night on a Bare Mountain*.

A world premier of *Song of the Sea* by Katherina Hristova was performed. Katherina was also in the audience to take the well deserved plaudits.

Members of the audience commented that it was a stunning evening.

After the interval, Grieg's wonderful *In the Hall of the Mountain King* set the bar high. This was followed by *In the Mountain* by Bloch for a quartet, and to bring the curtain down was *Scenes from the Scottish Highlands* by Bantock, which had the strings transformed into bagpipes.

Under the energetic direction of Shulah Oliver, who is also The Midland Sinfonia's Artistic Director, the orchestra shines and demonstrates their improvement on every occasion, including this one.

Shulah had the audience enraptured with humorous anecdotes and offered fascinating background to the works and the composers.

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Village artists show off in the city

Some members of the collective (from left): Natasha, Amanda, Julie, Michelle, Suzanne, Juliet and Edwina.

THE North Worcestershire Art Collective is a group made up of eight artists, who all met through Worcestershire Open Studios in 2021, and collaborate for shows, exhibitions and events and support each other's work.

They have recently been invited to take over the Purple Gallery in Bournville to exhibit their eclectic mix of bold and contemporary art works throughout the three gallery rooms during March.

Jane Aston, whose studio is in Alvechurch, said: "Due to our many art commitments, it is quite difficult to get us all together at every one of our exhibitions so we are delighted to be able to do so at Purple Gallery."

Each of the artists' unique styles will be on display in a variety of mediums including oil, acrylic, pastels, watercolour, inks and digital art.

The Purple Gallery is an independent art gallery that opened in Birmingham in April 2005. If you would like to explore the exhibition, the event opens on Friday 8 March and concludes on Saturday 30, March.

Visitors will also be able to meet the artists on Saturdays throughout March from 1pm until 5pm and complimentary drinks and nibbles will be available.

Purple gallery: Jane Aston (left) with gallery owner Julia Fourteau and her partner Richard Russell, who both currently live in Alvechurch.

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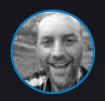

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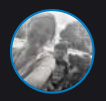

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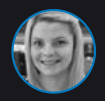

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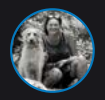

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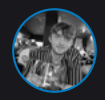

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ALL ABOUT THE JOURNEY

Recently, over a cup of coffee and casual chatter with my mum, the topic of holidays took an interesting turn.

Amidst sharing plans for a family vacation to Dubai, I shared the jaw-dropping cost of upgrading to first class for our family of four.

I jokingly concluded that I'd probably have to wait until the kids grew up and flew the nest to indulge in such luxury.

My mum, ever the pragmatic voice of reason, responded with a perspective that sparked a deeper conversation. "I could never justify paying that much money," she said, "just how much money would you need in your bank to be able to justify that sort of cost?"

It was a sentiment I understood but couldn't help but challenge.

And so began a conversation that delved into the heart of financial planning – a realm where the value of money extends beyond numerical figures and into the terrain of personal goals, dreams, and aspirations.

In this light, the dialogue shifted from justifying the cost of first-class travel to understanding that the true essence of financial planning lies in aligning our spending with what holds personal value.

What my mum might see as an exorbitant expense for a flight, I might perceive as an investment in a unique and memorable experience.

This simple exchange brought to the forefront the fact that financial planning is not a "one-size-fits-all" endeavour.

It's about crafting a bespoke plan that resonates with individual dreams and aspirations. It's not about the amount of money in the bank; it's about ensuring that the money we have serves as a tool to

This month, PPM's chartered financial planner **Laura Siddall** shares a recent story that reminded her of the value of Financial Planning.

lead a fulfilling life based on our unique priorities.

While contemplating the wealth needed to paint your dream canvas is undeniably thought-provoking (and enjoyable!), the essence of financial planning extends far beyond these aspirations.

It is, at its core, a strategic approach to life that empowers individuals to navigate the complexities of their financial landscape.

It offers direction in achieving a range of objectives. It provides peace of mind in times of uncertainty, facilitates the realisation of personal goals, and enables the building of resources, allowing flexibility to pursue your dreams, explore passions, enjoy life experiences, and create a comfortable future.

Crafting a life that balances immediate desires with long-term security, ensuring that each financial decision contributes to a fulfilling and purpose-driven journey.

A tailored financial plan becomes the compass in this journey, guiding us toward our aspirations and helping us navigate the path between what we spend and what we value. It's about making intentional choices that align with our individual definitions of happiness and success.

After all, life is the main event – we need to savour the journey, not just the milestones.

So, the next time you find yourself pondering the cost of an extravagant experience or questioning your spending habits, remember: it's not about the money in your bank alone. It's about designing the blueprint to a life lived on your terms.

Start your financial plan with a one hour life plan meeting at our offices. There is no cost for this meeting and no obligation to proceed if you don't think it is for you.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Laura Siddall
Chartered Financial Planner
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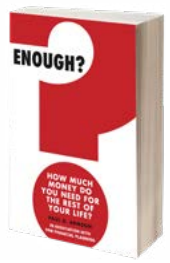

SPRINGING INTO ACTION

As we approach a new season, **Mark Meads** tells us how **Village Financial** can help you make home changes run more smoothly.

Is Spring the time for new home plans?
Image by Michael Corfield

SPRING is in the air, the nights are drawing out and, in spite of the relentless rain, bulbs are finally starting to surface.

As the seasons move forward, perhaps you're also thinking of changes ahead?

Whether you're remortgaging, raising funds to improve your property, moving home, investing in a buy to let property or taking the leap as a first time buyer, we can help make the process run more smoothly for you.

We are able to advise on mortgages and protection for all adults of any age and circumstance. So whether you've seen your dream home on the market, or decided to revamp your own home; whether you've decided to help your children get on the property ladder or feel it's time to downsize – we can help you every step of the way.

As your local mortgage adviser, we promise to liaise with estate agents and lawyers, keep you updated and generally take the strains and stresses out of the mortgage process for you.

Mark Meads (above), is here to help make sure you are on the right path with your mortgage.

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Right above our heads

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

MARCH sees the welcome return of spring, which starts on the day of the Equinox, the 20th, when the centre of the Sun crosses the plane of Earth's equator.

However, the day on which the number of hours of daylight hits nearly 12, is the 17th.

Why? Well two reasons really. . .

One is that the Sun is not a pinpoint of light like the stars we see at night. So daylight starts when the edge of the disc of the Sun first appears over the horizon and finishes when the edge disappears.

Also, atmospheric refraction causes the Sun to appear a few minutes before it actually rises above the horizon and set a few minutes late. It is also worth noting is that the sunset gets later by about two minutes each day through the month.

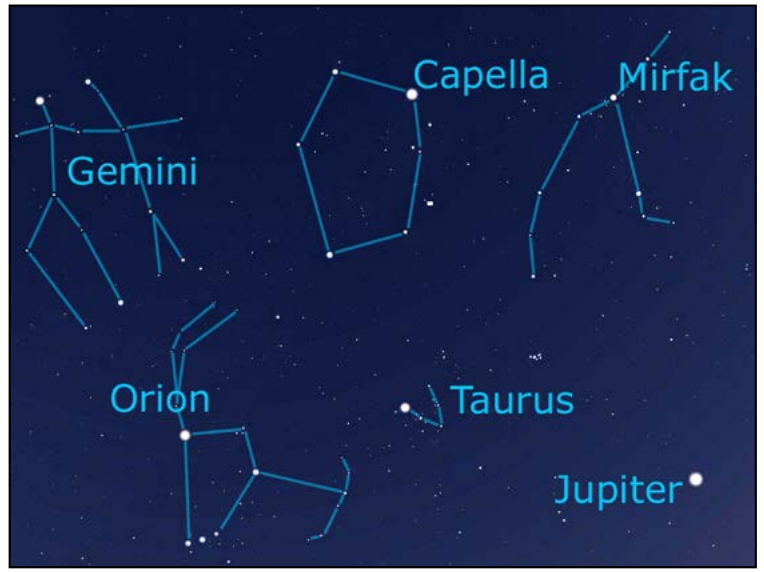
So what can we see when it does start to get dark at nearly 8pm?

Jupiter is still with us, over in the south west now, still dominating this area of the sky, especially when a thin crescent moon is close by on the 13th.

With a decent pair of binoculars you can just about make out the four big moons of Jupiter or even better with a small telescope – worth doing right now because NASA's amazing *Juno* spacecraft has just returned some wonderful images of the innermost of these moons: Io (yes, it does have a two letter name).

This little world, slightly larger than our own moon, is tortured by the gravity of its giant planet and is reckoned to be the most volcanic place in the Solar System, giving it the appearance of a rather unappetising pizza.

Jupiter is gone from our skies by 10.30pm, confounding any late night stargazing revellers.



Look up this March: Constellations and bright stars to look out for.
Images courtesy of NASA.

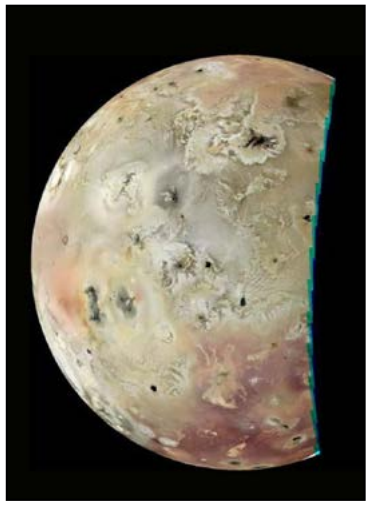
Further east, or left, we have unmistakable Orion and Taurus but above them, nearly overhead is one the brightest stars in the sky.

This is Capella, in the constellation of Auriga although this can be tricky to make out. In common with most stars, it is a collection of several stars, in this case, four in two pairs. The main pair are both about twice the size of our Sun and orbit each other at a similar distance as we are from our own star.

The views from a planet there would be spectacular although it's a bit far to travel at roughly 43 light years away.

A little to the right or west of Capella is another bright star and this is Mirfak in the constellation of Perseus, that Ancient Greek superhero and saviour of Andromeda. This is easier to make out than Auriga but I always think it looks a bit like a giraffe.

Mirfak is reckoned to be nearly 70 times as big as the Sun and no less than five thousand times as bright.



The most volcanic place in the Solar Sytem: One of Jupiter's Moons, Io, as pictured by Juno, the NASA spacecraft.

It is, however, a long way away at 500 light years so doesn't light up our night skies as you would expect.

So, a couple of constellations with bright stars to look out for, little known because they are right above our heads.

IT'S VERY WET OUT THERE!

Alvechurch amateur weatherman **Phil Thomas** records the changes.

ALTHOUGH January gave the year a cold, wet start, with 27.5mm of rain falling over the first two days, it remained dry for most of the month, with some rain falling between 21st and the 25th.

January did bring a spell of strong winds, with gusts of 58mph recorded on the 23rd and 51mph on the 24th, causing some very blustery weather and in some areas of the village, trees and fences coming down.

February similarly started very wet (though with milder temperatures), and the weather continued to be quite unsettled for most of the month. 58.2mm of rain fell between 7–9 February, and up to the 18th of the month a total of 107.9mm had fallen.

Much more than we would expect at 201% of the average for this time of year.

Weather however remained fairly mild, and on 15th February, a maximum temperature of 16.5C was recorded – one of the highest February temperatures ever measured locally.

The Outlook

IN the first few days of March there is likely to be an increased chance of winds from the west, then edging northerly later in the month.

This has the potential to lead to unsettled conditions initially, with transitory settled periods and typically average temperatures in the Atlantic flow in northern regions.

The likelihood of colder and drier than average conditions are then likely from the middle of March as we continue further into spring.

This is the last article from Alvechurch weatherman Phil. We would like to thank him for his articles and hope he continues to send us updates during particularly interesting spells of weather in the future.

Lots of locks: Icy canals show not a lot of movement in the chilly weather.

Above: A frosty start to the day on Newborne Hill.

Above: A robin balances on ice.

January 2023

Mean Max	7.4C	0.4C above average
Mean Min	1.6C	0.1C below average
Mean	4.5C	0.2C above average
Rainfall	67.6mm	91% of average
Sunshine	74.3hrs	127% of average

February 2023 (to 18th)

Mean Max	11.5C	3.7C above average
Mean Min	5.6C	3.9C above average
Mean	8.6C	3.8C above average
Rainfall	107.9mm	201% of average
Sunshine	30hrs	54% of average

More information at ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com*** You can see an improved HD weather-cam, updated at one-minute intervals, at: ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com/webcam_alvechurch.php***

Few flowered garlic.

DELIGHTS OF SPRING

Mary Green tells us about the plants we can expect to see appearing this spring, and some we may be lucky to spot.

SPRING will have come by now even if the weather turns cold, so I'm writing about some of the plants thriving at this time – the bulbs. They are part of a group of plants called monocotyledons – one of two groups, the other being dicotyledons.

There are far more families of dicotyledons, so monocotyledons seem at first glance to be less important – but they include some of our most widespread plants.

Apart from the bulbs, there are all the grasses, reeds, rushes and sedges in this group, so you can't go far without seeing a monocotyledon!

Monocotyledons are so called because when the first "seed leaf" emerges, there is only one. With dicotyledons, there is a pair of leaves.

Unless you see the plants germinate you may well not notice this.

But also, most monocotyledons have adult leaves which are simple, long and pointed, like grass. This

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makes them much more recognisable.

The group we call bulbs all have swollen underground growths, which store the nutrients from the previous year and allow a new flower to grow this year. They are obviously perennial.

Our native ones include wild daffodils, bluebells, scyllas, meadow saffron, fritillaries – all of which we know well as attractive flowers which have often been taken into breeding to become cultivated varieties.

Native daffodils have almost disappeared in the wild from round here but used to be very common in woodland and hedgerows. Fortunately in recent years they have been replanted and can become naturalised.

They are quite small and pale yellow, simple in shape, and usually flower in late February or March. There is a whole wood-full of them at Chance Wood near Stourbridge, but you can also find some in the Meadows in Alvechurch (as well as cultivated varieties), a few in St Laurence churchyard (ditto) – and some in my garden and other people's!

Daffodils, like snowdrops, contain drugs which are being investigated for medical use, and are poisonous to many mammals and insects, though not all.

They are not very helpful to insects: though they produce some pollen and nectar they are not very nectar-rich. This is because they don't rely on insect pollination to survive.

However, their bright colours and sometimes their perfume do attract what few insects are about in the spring.

Bluebells still exist in the wild, quite plentifully though always under threat of destruction. Like most bulbs they need undisturbed soil and prefer wooded areas. They mark where ancient woodland was and where the soil is still intact.

Our native species of bluebell doesn't appear much outside the British Isles. It has drooping flowers, quite dark blue, and a lovely perfume. This indicates that it is insect-attracting, and the drooping flowers allow it some protection if the spring weather isn't as good as it should be.

Above: Wild garlic in bulb.
Right: A different sight, when the wild garlic flowers.

Unfortunately, insect pollination means it is susceptible to cross-pollination with the introduced Spanish bluebell.

Despite this, real native bluebells persist well round here. They are brilliant in Peck Wood but also in many smaller patches of woodland – there is an especially good one up Grange Lane.

They are in lots of roadside banks – Scarfield Hill, for example – and in old pasture or meadow fields, like toward the top of Foxhill fields and in Scarfield Dingle.

Along the canal there is a stretch between Scarfield Dingle and Grange Lane with ancient woodland remnants on both banks (big old oak and ash trees) and bluebells on both sides. It's near here that I and a lot of others have seen kingfishers in and out of the canal bank recently, and it seems right that they nest among the bluebells and oaks.

In March and April the beautiful fritillaries flower.

I don't think they survive in the wild round here but they are a true native flower, and have been widely re-introduced.

Crocuses on the other hand are not native, though a welcome early spring garden flower. There is a crocus-like flower called meadow saffron (Colchicum) which flowers in early autumn in old meadows like Eades meadow. The true saffron is a crocus but is not a British wildflower.

There's another group of bulbs we all know and love, and these are edible. They are the Alliums – onions, leeks and garlics. There are wild varieties of these about.

Wild garlic or ransoms is common in woodland and in woodland remnants – usually in damper areas, slightly different to where the bluebells are but flowering about the same time. The leaves are around now and are delicious, raw or cooked.

Three-cornered garlic grows wild in Cornwall but sometimes escapes from gardens round here – also delicious. In two or three places here you can also find the rarer few-flowered garlic, growing on old roadside verges if they have escaped mowing. The rule here is - if it smells of onion or garlic, it's edible! But only pick small amounts of the common one.

You'll also know another group of monocotyledons if you read my articles – orchids.

They aren't bulbs but have swollen roots underground which allow them to spread without being pollinated, though they do attract insects.

The word orchid comes from the

Above: Wild daffodils grow in woodland.

word for testicle because of the shape. These swollen roots interact strongly with underground fungi and won't live long without them. Because of this orchids are very susceptible to ground being disturbed and have become rare.

You can find green-winged, common spotted, fragrant, pyramid, bee and twayblade orchids in ancient meadows and pastures, some woods (there are early purple orchids in Shortwood) and occasional hedge banks and canal-sides if they aren't mown down, which they usually are.

Less glamorous, but equally amazing-looking is the common cuckoo-pint or lords-and ladies, another monocotyledon though with a wider leaf.

This one really does want to attract insects, luring them into its flower via a big pointed spadix. Its appearance gives it lots of rude names! And in summer the last flower of this group is the beautiful yellow iris, common by the canal.

And then there are all the grasses, rushes, sedges, reeds and other grass-like plants. Grass is everywhere and we take it for granted. It covered the

Above: Expect to see fritillaries flowering in the spring
Right: Spot orchids in ancient meadows and on the canal, if you're lucky.

ground where there were clearings in our native woodland, and spread rapidly when people started keeping grazing animals.

We have dozens of different kinds of native grasses with evocative names like Yorkshire fog, cocksfoot, foxtail and timothy.

Many of these have been destroyed over the last couple of centuries and

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replaced by a monoculture of ryegrass. They are wind-pollinated so don't help our insect population much, though some of them are food plants for butterfly and other insect larvae.

They also provide important nesting sites for some birds. They grow naturally with lots of other flowering plants rather than on their own. In fact, their real contribution to biodiversity probably lies in the mixed grass and wildflower pasture lands which host so many of our native birds, mammals and insects.

Grasses are perennials and should grow and seed, when their roots also grow deep and help create a good soil and capture carbon.

Unfortunately it is rare to see grass left uncut. If it's still green in winter, there's something wrong! It should grow long and wavy, set seeds and drop them in the wind, then go yellowish-white.

Wild grasses were taken into cultivation tens of thousands of years ago and form our cereal crops: wheat, oats, barley, rice and rye.

These were bred to be very high in carbohydrates and thus became starchy staple foods rather than the complex native seeds. They were also bred to be annual plants, re-sown every year. This meant the soil has to be ploughed, its carbon released back into the atmosphere, and its fungi destroyed.

Wild grasses help the climate, cultivated cereals help destroy it. Grass-and-flower land needs grazing animals to keep it in check and fertilised. Once this would have been wild cattle, horses, deer, rabbits: now mostly domesticated animals. Though grass is a staple food for them, it's not enough – they need all the other flowering plants as well for a balanced diet. If they feed on monoculture ryegrass they need artificial food supplements: if they feed on flower-rich leys (as on Cooper's Hill Farm here) that's all they need.

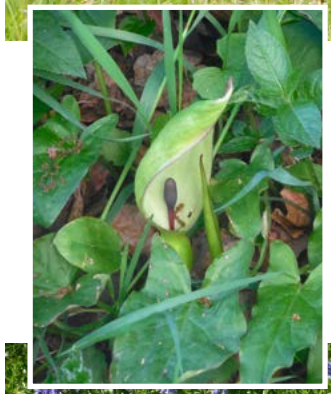
There's a special little monocotyledon to look out for at this time of year.

Good Friday Grass isn't actually a grass but a rush, its proper name being Field Wood Rush. It grows in old undisturbed pasture so there's lots in the ancient fields round here and the Wiggins meadows.

It also grows a lot in churchyards where it often flowers around Good Friday, and, I'm delighted to find, persists in many lawns in Alvechurch, another proof of the underlying meadow habitat which had never quite been destroyed.

Its name goes well with the other common name for the wild daffodil, the Lent Lily, and reminds us that plants have historically been associated with special times of year.

■ **Here's a poem (right) about wild garlic I wrote a couple of years ago about this time.**



Above: 'Good Friday Grass' which can be found in The Meadows playing fields in Alvechurch.
Left: Cuckoo Pint.
Below: Bluebells, which will spring up around the village area in the coming months.

Ramsons

They come up suddenly, not like the bluebells
Which have been spearing up for weeks, sharp as blades.
They are softer, wider, looser, the greenest green
In the same spot as last year, but always a few more.
Their bulbs have been cuddled among old oak roots
All winter, all year, decades and centuries
And they move quickly into the light of spring
I pick a handful and fill my pocket. They will go well
With those first salad leaves, or stuff that chicken.
Soon the flowers will come, starring the path-side
Across from the elegant bluebells, their warring scents
Earth and air, water and fire, drawing down the sun.

The anonymous birder

How to enjoy village birdlife

A magical, mythical bird

FOR the casual and keen birder alike, seeing the aquamarine vapour trail of a kingfisher as it bursts away with a sharp "peep" signals a good day without the need to see much else.

Even better if you can get near a perched bird as it focuses intently on the next meal swimming about below it, doing all the complicated geometry of diving from one medium to another to catch a slippery movable target, allowing us time to examine a local bird of paradise.

If you do get a close look, the female can be distinguished by her orange lower bill as opposed to the all black of the male.

If you are lucky enough to have a nesting pair on your local walk you'll see them quite regularly, as they can make more than 100 catches in a day when feeding young, bounding up and down the waterways.

However, many folk have never seen one. If that's you but would like to catch a glimpse, then any still or slow flowing water courses in good condition with overhanging branches are a possibility.

For many, including on my local walk, canals will provide the best opportunity, and not uncommon. Listen out for the sharp peep, too.

When nesting, they make a burrow in a bank about 50cm long with an incubation chamber at the end, a bit like a yard of ale. They will have up to two broods a year, usually laying between five and seven pearly white eggs.

Both the parents and offspring have an unusually civilised approach to mating and feeding, in a world where most young will step over and on their fellow companions to gain their snack and where a barn owl will think nothing of eating a fellow sibling if overly peckish (sorry).

The male will bring the female gifts of fish prior to breeding and both parents share the provision of meals such as minnows, sticklebacks and other water based items. The young will judiciously rotate the feeding rota so all, initially, get their fair share. Any birds forgetting themselves get a blunt reminder from the others to wait their turn. Eventually the usual bunfight – or should I say fishfight– commences, but at least they've had a reasonable, self-regulated start to life.

Unmistakable: A vivid blue kingfisher perches on a branch, perhaps looking for its next meal on the canal at Alvechurch. *Picture by Wendy Easter*

The overwhelming feature of the kingfisher is it's vivid cyan, blue/green and orange plumage which seems to change with the light. The orange breast is caused by a pigment in the feathers but the blue range of colour is due to the bending of light by the structure of the keratin contained in the feathers.

So it doesn't have these bluey green colours itself but, like a prism, in flight creates the colour we see. I know, I don't really understand it either, but it just adds to the magical nature of the bird.

If you like to wind down with a bit of Shakespeare or Marlowe, you may come across a reference to "the halcyon", which is the Greek word for a kingfisher. In mythology Zeus got annoyed with a couple called Alcyone and Ceyx turning them them into kingfishers.

Poseidon must have felt sorry for them and kept the water becalmed for several days either side of the winter solstice so they could make a start to family life. These were known in our parts as the "halcyon days" or St Martin's little summer – a short spell of fine weather occuring in November, and more generally, a reference to a fondly remembered period of life.

Kingfishers will be pairing up and breeding by late March if the weather is kind so if you are out and about on the waterways I wish you a halcyon day. Failing that, there's always the Kingfisher shopping centre . . .

In the third week of March if we get a warm southerly wind around St Patrick's day, listen out for the unmistakable call of the Chiff Chaff, our first incoming warbler of the year.

Spring is approaching apace and birdsong has noticeably increased with most of the common species singing now.

If you would like to join the second *Village* birdwalk to identify common birdsong and species, please contact the editor at:
editor@villageonline.co.uk

Last year's outing was very enjoyable. In the meantime, happy birding.

JL

LEARN ABOUT YOUR LAWN

As we approach spring, lawn care expert and owner of **Lawnwise**, **Ross Dustan** gives his top tips for caring for your lawn, with his comprehensive guide to a lush and healthy lawn.

The lawn care expert: Ross Dustan gives *The Village* his top lawn care tips to help you get your lawn looking great for spring.

SPRING is just around the corner (starting on the 1st March meteorologically speaking), so as the days start getting longer and the weather turns milder, it's time to turn our attention to one of the most beloved features of our homes: the lawn.

After months of dormancy, our lawns are ready to awaken and thrive once again. However, to ensure that your lawn emerges from its winter slumber in top condition, it's important that you provide the care and attention it deserves.

Spring is a critical time for lawn maintenance, setting the stage for a healthy, vibrant lawn throughout the year.

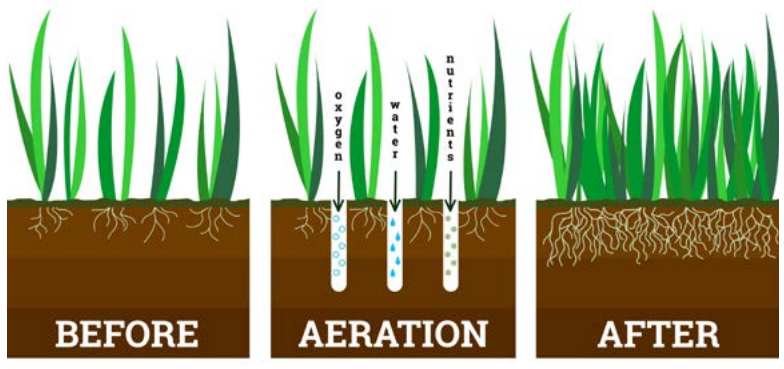
In this article, we'll explore the essential steps to ensure your lawn thrives this spring and beyond.

1. ASSESS YOUR LAWN'S NEEDS:

Before diving into any maintenance tasks, take stock of your lawn's condition.

Look for areas of compaction, thin or bare spots, excessive moss or weed growth, and signs of pest or disease damage.

Understanding your lawn's specific needs will help you develop a tailored care plan.



Lawn aeration: How this annual process helps your lawn to thrive year-round.

Image: Shutterstock

2. CLEAR UP DEBRIS:

Remove any fallen leaves, branches, and other debris that may have accumulated over the winter months. This will allow for better air circulation and sunlight penetration, promoting healthy grass growth.

3. AERATION:

Compacted soil can suffocate grass roots and inhibit growth.

Spring is an ideal time to aerate your lawn, allowing oxygen, water, and nutrients to penetrate deep into the soil.

By addressing soil compaction, improving air and water movement, and promoting root development, aeration helps to create a strong, resilient lawn that is better able to withstand environmental stresses and maintain its beauty year-round.

BENEFITS OF AERATION

- Relieves soil compaction
- Improves surface drainage
- Increases flow of oxygen, water and nutrients to the rootzone
- Strengthens grass, minimising moss development

4. SCARIFICATION/ RAKING:

Use a rake or scarifier to remove any built-up thatch – a layer of dead grass and organic matter that can smother your lawn – or moss.

If removing moss, it is worthwhile treating with a moss killer first. This will make the moss easier to come up, and spread fewer moss spores in the process.

MOSSY LAWNS

Moss has really thrived this year, with the mild and wet winter providing the ideal growing conditions. Some of the key reasons for moss growth in your lawn include:

- Wet soils with poor surface drainage
- Excessive shade cast by trees and shrubs
- Grass cut too short
- Heavily compacted soil
- Weak or unhealthy grass

5. OVERSEEDING:

Fill in bare patches and promote thick, healthy turf by overseeding in the spring. Choose a high-quality grass seed blend suited to your lawn and ground conditions.

Prepare the soil by raking it lightly, then spread the seed evenly over the area. Water gently and keep the soil consistently moist until the new grass establishes itself.

6. FERTILISATION:

Spring is a critical time to feed your lawn and replenish essential nutrients. Choose a fertiliser specifically formulated for spring application, with a balanced ratio of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (N-P-K). Apply the fertiliser evenly using a spreader, following the manufacturer's instructions for application rates.

Be careful not to over-fertilise, as this can lead to excessive grass growth or scorching of the lawn.

7. WEED CONTROL:

Spring is prime time for weeds to germinate and invade your lawn. Stay ahead of the game by implementing a proactive weed control strategy.

To target existing weeds, try either removing by hand, or if this isn't practical, use a selective herbicide specifically for lawns – be careful not to use a total herbicide as this will also kill your grass! Always follow the label when using weed killers.

See the difference: Before and after a spring lawn renovation.

8. WATERING:

Unless we have a very dry spring, watering the lawn at this time shouldn't be necessary. However, if needed water deeply and infrequently to encourage deep root growth and drought resistance. Early morning is the best time to water, minimising evaporation and reducing the risk of fungal diseases.

9. MOWING:

As your lawn comes out of dormancy, it's time to start mowing regularly. Set your mower blades to the appropriate height for your grass type and avoid cutting more than one-third of the grass blade at a time. Ensure that your mower blade is sharp to provide a clean cut, and mow when the grass is dry to prevent clumping.

BY following these essential tips for spring lawn care, you can set your lawn up for success and enjoy a lush, healthy lawn throughout the growing season.

Remember that consistency is key, so stay proactive and attentive to your lawn's needs as it transitions from winter dormancy to springtime splendour.

Above: Fertiliser is best applied using a spreader.

Image: Shutterstock

With a little effort and care, you'll be rewarded with a vibrant and beautiful lawn that enhances the beauty and value of your home.

READY TO GIVE YOUR LAWN THE CARE IT DESERVES?

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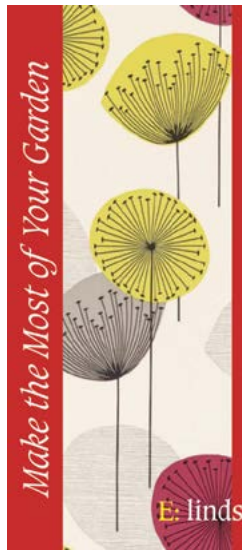

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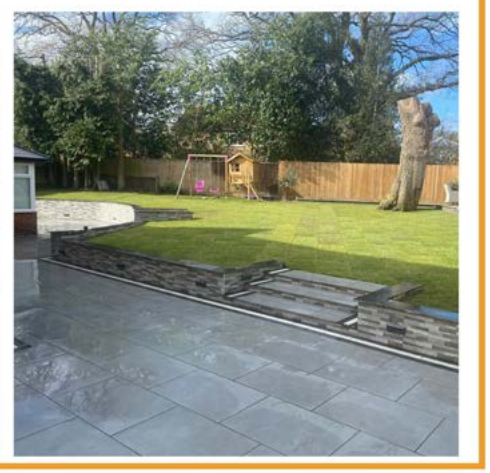

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EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA'S 14th YOUNG MUSICIANS' SHOWCASE will be on Sunday 17th March at 3pm in St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. This event offers local young musicians the opportunity to gain experience performing in a concert setting. A supportive audience is encouraged to attend, all are welcome admission free however donations to the TMS Education & Outreach programme will be appreciated.
On Saturday 11th May at 3pm in St Laurence Church they will hold a FAMILY CONCERT which is a fun-filled afternoon for the whole family. This year it will include the story of Alice in Wonderland.
Tickets: £8 adults £3 students and under 16s/ under 5s free from The Lounge and Gin & Pickles Alvechurch, also by BACS www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA, conducted by Lee Armstrong, will give their Spring Concert on Sunday 24th March 2024 at 7.30pm in St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green, B45 8NR. The interesting programme will include:- Liszt, arr. Armstrong - Ave stella maris; Downes - Lento molto from Symphony No.2; Coates - Miniature Suite; Beethoven Symphony No.3 Op.55 'Eroica'. Admission is free, and donations to the retiring collection are much appreciated. You are invited to come along, and bring your friends. Save the Date for their Summer Concert, which will be on 30th June 2024 in the same venue.

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY will hold their Annual Spring Concert at 7.30pm on Saturday March 16th at North Bromsgrove High School. It will feature the music of Bach and Mozart.
Mozart is represented by his famous Requiem and Bach by his Cantata No. 80, "Ein feste Burg ist Unser Gott" (based on the hymn tune "A Safe Stronghold our God is Still"), "Air from Suite No.3 in D" and "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring".
The society will be joined by an orchestra and four talented soloists; Jennifer Walker (soprano), who returns to her home town to perform, and whose successful career has included many operatic roles and several solos for BBC Radio 3, well known local baritone David Coulson, who has sung in several concerts previously with the Society, Hope Pugh (alto) and Ed Harrison (tenor).
Tickets are £15 each (under 16s free), including a glass of wine or a soft drink, and are available from any member of the society or on the door. Free parking for the concert is at the rear of the school.

MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. For more information or to join or book us, see our website www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. They are in the Crown Inn on 11 March and Alvechurch Village Hall on 4 and 18 March, after which they have an Easter break, returning on 8 April.

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy, cinema and jazz nights. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm.
For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm.
For more information and details, contact Paul on 07973 759340 or Richard 01527 66646. The programme is subject to change if the circumstances dictate.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings.
They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical mu sic along with much more.
Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. They meet on Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs FREE weekly string orchestra, concert band and beginner group Lift Off! sessions for young musicians. New members always welcome! Sessions are run by Severn Arts at The Orchards School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm Individual instrumental lessons are also provided at the centre. For more info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available.
More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or email r.g.henley@btinternet.com

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY meets in the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, on Mondays from 7.45 - 9.45pm. The choir sings a range of music throughout the year, performing at least 3 concerts. New singers are always welcome and there is no need to audition!
For more information, see barntgreenchoralsociety.org or facebook.com/barntgreenchoralsociety.

DANCING

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/ Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Covid-dependent, so please check first by emailing alvechurchfrenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry.
They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day. No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group!
Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

DANCE AND FITNESS at Bournheath Village Hall including Adult Zumba, Pilates and Stretch classes as well as KS1 and Baby Ballet. For more information message 'Dance With Nikki' on social media or n.foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

LINEDANCE CLASS, every Thursday between 6pm - 7pm at Extracare Longbridge Village. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

BEGINNERS LINEDANCE class, Tuesdays 6pm - 7pm at West Heath Community Centre, Hamstead House, B31 3QY. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

NEW SALSA dance classes, every Thursday at the Alvechruch Inn, B48 7LD. Doors open at 6pm. Beginners classes at 7pm, with the main class at 8pm. All classes are £9 each or both classes for £15. Come on your own or with friends. Contact 07779686679.

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WHAT'S ON GUIDE

CHUGGERS & CHAINGANG

WITH the spring months approaching, Chuggers & Chaingang, the local run and ride club based at Barnt Green Sports Club, are looking forward to the season with two initiatives.

For those wishing to ride with Chaingang there are two dates for introduction rides. These are not a test of ability or speed, they are to ensure safe group riding for new and existing members.

They will be held on Sunday 24 March at 2pm or Thursday 18 April at 7pm. Both lasting approx 90 mins and include a short briefing plus a group ride, around 10 miles.

***Up & Running* is aimed at anyone looking to start or someone that hasn't run for a while and wishes to go back to basics.**

Up & Running will be led by trained run leaders who have knowledge and experience of running from scratch, building up distance and confidence all in an enjoyable environment.

It will commence on Sunday 7 April and will continue for approximately six weeks with the aim of completing a 5k run at the end of the course.

Equipped with the knowledge and fitness from this course, you'll easily be able to run with the running groups on Club runs thereafter.

Formed in 2005, Barnt Green Chuggers (Running) and Chaingang (Cycling) Club provides sessions for all abilities and are aimed at those simply wanting to stay in shape as well as those wanting to improve their running, cycling and fitness.

They are principally a social and recreational club and don't focus on competition.

Weekly Chugger sessions are Monday at 7pm with additional sessions on Wednesday evenings.

Chaingang rides are Wednesday evenings at7pm with additional sessions on Saturday mornings.

If you are interested in attending an introduction ride, would like to try Up & Running or are already a seasoned runner and would like to join a Chugger club run then please contact Membership Secretary Kate Gallimore kategallimore@googlemail.com or visit www.barntgreenchuggers.co.uk.

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BALLROOM/LATIN SEQUENCE dance some line dance held on the first Friday of the month (check just in case Friday has to change because of commitments in the village) from 8pm -10.30pm at Extracare Longbridge Village, B31 2FZ. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS invite you to their autumn film screenings. Admission is free however donations are welcome. Full details can be found at The Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Rd, Barnt Green. On 16th March the film will be set in 1931 Paris: an orphan living in the walls of a train station gets wrapped up in a mystery involving his late father and an automaton. Homage to early filmmaker, Georges Méliès.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood. Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. More info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact: Charles Deverill on cdjd26@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall, unless otherwise noted. Entry at talks and AGM is free for members and £1 for guests, including a drink and biscuits. Litter picks start at 10am. from the village square. Other social events are by ticket and details of venue, start time and price will be published by the organisers nearer the time.
The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on Wed 20 March at 7:30pm. This meeting is open to all, and is held in the Village Hall. Any members of the Society who wish to join the committee for the coming year should contact one of the current officers prior to the AGM.

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves. They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be pleased to see you.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details: www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre. If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heart-speakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmasters-heartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 2nd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Burcot Grange. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm. There is usually a guest speaker. They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity. Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. or email contact@wbdcs.org.uk. Non-members are welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB the speaker on the 13th March is Richard Churchley, his subject is entitled "Off to the Workhouse", which promises to be a very interesting insight into the conditions that some of our ancestors endured. Please come along and find out for yourself and meet other members, while enjoying a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit after the talk. They meet at 1.30pm at the Cricket Club in Alvechurch where there is plenty of parking. More details from Janet Manners on 447 7870 or Lis on 445 3895.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12pm at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides opportunities for retired and semi retired men to meet socially. A members meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Wednesday monthly 10am until 12pm, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. Other regular activities include monthly walks, lunches including partners, snooker--, social outings and IT. For more info visit www.bromsgrove1982probus.weebly.com or contact Martin on 07717 150136.

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955. New members welcome.

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment. They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in

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Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and the odd reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

The North Worcestershire Association of the NATIONAL TRUST hold monthly meetings with interesting speakers on 3rd Thursday 7.30pm at Tardebigge Community Hall, also walks, outings and an annual holiday. For further info email Ros257@yahoo.co.uk

Bromsgrove & District AMATEUR RADIO CLUB meets every Friday evening from 7.30pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. The club is open to anyone with an interest in Amateur Radio. More details from the secretary Alan on 07886 000052 or secretary@bromsgroveradioclub.co.uk

COMMUNITY COFFEE morning - open to all. Free refreshments and chat. Wednesdays 10-12 at Barnt Green Baptist Church. Enquiries can be made to: events@bgb.org.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, please contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com. There are a number of walks coming up, the next will be Around Rowney Green, on Sunday March 3 at 2pm led by Martin and Mariea Clarke. Meet at Rowney Green Village Hall B48 7QP. Call 07742 100007 for details.
The following walk will be A Wildlife Walk at a Slow Pace on 7 April, led by Mary Green at 2pm. Meet at The Crown in Withybed Green, B48 7PN. For details call 0121 445 5957.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties - contact: bgfcmembership@outlook.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

MEDITATION CLASSES for Everyone. Come and try a KIND approach to Meditation and experience for yourself the revitalising power of a relaxed, calm, clear mind, whether beginner or experienced practitioner. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, online or a mixture. REDUCE STRESS, FEEL CALMER, SLEEP BETTER. To join us for a trail contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F Sally My Yoga Mind

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or on Facebook @Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or call Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.
Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.
Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park. Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area. Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins). Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established. Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground. Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES with Steff Affleck (Rowney Green) Mat classes, apparatus 1:1 and duets. Irrespective of age, gender, health or fitness we could all benefit from understanding more about how to keep moving well. Joseph Pilates' system of exercise, using apparatus he invented, enables you to challenge what is strong, build what is weaker, exploring how you can balance the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Graduate of Pilates Professional Advanced Teacher Training; teaching Pilates for 17 years. Call 07759590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk Mat classes and 1:1 (apparatus).

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

ACTIVE SENIORS Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Village Hall, run by Bromsgrove council on Fridays starting 9.15am, £5 per class. Contact g.peart@hotmail.co.uk or call on 07828 515344 for more information.

YOGA for Every-Body. Come and try a fresh approach to Yoga, that works with your body rather than against it. A slow-paced, yet powerful Yoga for EveryBody, whether beginner or experienced, flexible or wishing you were. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, Blackwell First School, online or a mixture. MOVE BETTER, BE CALMER, FEEL GREAT! To trial a class, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F: Sally My Yoga Mind

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm.

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

6 WEEK MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS COURSES to help you relax, find inner peace, and elevate your life. Join them on Wednesday evenings at The Friends Meeting House in Barnt Green or online whenever it suits you. Suitable for everyone! Enrol in the upcoming courses and discover how they've been changing lives at www.MeditationWithCoz.com or contact Coz at 07770067349. Follow on Facebook/Instagram: @MeditationWithCoz.

BARNT GREEN CHUGGERS & CHAINGANG provide run & cycling sessions for mixed abilities, those wanting to stay in shape plus those wishing to improve their running, cycling & fitness all in a social & recreational environment. Club Sessions - Chuggers (run) Monday & Wednesday 7pm and Chaingang (cycling) Wednesday 7pm & Saturday 9am all from Barnt Green Sports Club. For more info or to arrange a trial session please contact Membership Secretary kategallimore@googlemail.com

GENTLE EXERCISE CLASSES working on mobility, strength, flexibility and balance. Classes are very welcoming and inclusive and are held on: Wednesday's 1.30-2.30 at St Stephens Church Hall, Rednal and Thursdays 10am-11am Blackwell Community Hall, Blackwell. The cost is £5 per class. For more information call Lorraine 07866877881

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

EVERY SCOUT GROUP in Bromsgrove (which includes Barnt Green, Blackwell, Catshill, Finstall and Lickey as well as the town centre) currently has girls and boys aged 6-18 waiting to join, their numbers restricted by the ratio of adults to young people.

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A few more adults helping would enable existing leaders to open more Beaver, Cub, Scout and Explorer units allowing more young people to experience Scouting and learn skills for life. If you could spare a few hours each month please contact us on 07539 031740 or visit scoutshw.org.uk

CURIOUS CUBS: An outdoor playgroup promoting nature and learning through play. Sessions run on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays for walkers to five years. Based at Barnt Green Sports Club, Margesson Drive, B45 8LR. Visit www.curiouscubs.co.uk for more infomation and to book your place.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 18 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/ venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and post-natal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG. Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

TUTORING both online and in-person for Maths KS1 and KS2. English KS1 through to GCSE. For more information message 'Tutoring with Penny' on Facebook or email penny_foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

PRE-SCHOOL BALLET - NEW for September 2023 Pre-school (2 ½ - 4 yrs) ballet held at Barnt Green Baptist Church on Monday mornings from 10am. Contact dancingpointe@outlook.com for further details.

STAY & PLAY for under 5s and their carers (from 11th April 2024) running each Thursday from 9:30-11:30am during term time at Barnt Green Baptist Church, Bittel Road. Just pop along for play, singing & story time. Email familypastoral@bgb.org.uk for more info.

GAMES & COMPETITIONS

SHIRLEY & WYTHALL CHESS CLUB meets at Wythall Community Association in Silver Street, Wythall, B47 6LZ, every Thurs from 7.30pm. The club has four teams playing in competitive leagues. Friendly atmosphere. New players are most welcome, just turn up or contact Barry Knee on 01564 826250

MONDAY Bridge Club at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House meets on Monday evenings at 6.30pm. They would love to welcome new members. If you have played a little bridge in the past, come along to try the friendly club. For more information call Olivia on 07583 484065.

FRIDAY Bridge Club meets at Burcot Village Hall every Friday evening. We play friendly, competitive Bridge in comfortable surrounds. We meet at 18:45 for a prompt start at 19:00. Refreshments are provided free of charge. For full details please contact the Secretary Ed Payne on 07950951122 or visit www.bridgewebs.com/friday

BROMSGROVE Bridge Club plays every Tuesday evening from 7.25 to 10.30pm at The Court Leet (a Hungry Horse Pub) 174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, B61 7AY. We are very friendly and welcome guests or potential new members, with or without a partner. The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union and the Worcestershire Contract Bridge Association. Contact the Secretary, Sally Flood, on 01527 832468 or sallyflood@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE Board Gamers is a friendly group which meets at 7.30pm each Weds at the Ladybird Inn, Aston Fields. More info on Facebook 'Bromsgrove Board Gamers'.

BARNT Green Duplicate Bridge Club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall each Weds afternoon at 1.39pm. The club would make new members very welcome. For more information, speak to Cathy on 0121 445 1518.

REDDITCH CHESS CLUB meets at Alvechurch & Hopwood Cricket Club, Birmingham Road, Alvechurch B48 7TA, every Wednesday at 7.15pm September - May. The club has teams playing in both Birmingham and Worcester leagues. New players are welcome - just turn up or contact Giles Stanton on 07932 053621 or David Smith on 07540 304620.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share and discuss it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so.
They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request." Their next meeting is on 13 March. For more information, contact mail@marygreen.plus.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroft-arts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the first Thursday of the month from 2pm–3pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide Headquarters in Blackwell Road just beyond the Barnt Green Social Club. They run Tuesday morning and afternoon sessions with visiting tutors at 2 - 3 week intervals. Interested artists of all abilities are welcome. Please phone Jackie on 0121 445 4745 for details.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

THE SEASONS ART CLASS is an art course where you can discover your inner artist. Perfect for absolute beginners to improvers. Classes held at Rowney Green Village Hall, Bournheath Village Hall & Ullenhall Village Hall. Get in touch to find out more by emailing seasonsartredditch@outlook.com.

KINGS NORTON PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY meet at The Tennis Club, Grange Hill Road, Birmingham B38 8RE. Season starts 18/10/23 at 8.00pm. For information contact Dave Wall Tel: 0121 458 2562, email: dave.walluk@virgin.net

FORGE MILL CREATIVE TEXTILE GROUP are a friendly group of enthusiastic local stitchers, both experienced and beginners. They meet on Friday mornings at Beoley Village Hall. They are a leisure learning and development group exploring various techniques and media to create textiles artwork. Please contact Lynda on 0121 445 3212 or Janet on 0121 445 4335 for more information.

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meet at The Village Hall on the second Thursday of each month at 7.15pm. On Thursday, 14 March they welcome Wilson Wall to speak, and his topic is "Cultivating British Native Orchids in the Garden". Wilson's talk covers the way in which Bewdley Orchids grow these tricky plants from seed and how they are introduced into gardens and meadows. Guests are welcome £3.50 including coffee and biscuits. For more information please do not hesitate to contact Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 0121 445 1915.

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com. You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

HELP & ADVICE

POPPIES' is a monthly bereavement support group — contact Rev Sheri Gidney on 0121 445 1185 for details.

DIVORCED/separated and having trouble seeing your children? Being excluded from their lives? The ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED PARENTING has been helping mums and dads in the family court system and problems over contact and residence for over 20 years. Visit www.associationforsharedparenting.org.uk

REPAIR CAFE is for those looking to save their money and fix broken or faulty household items. The Repair Cafe is part of an international network that keeps faulty appliances and clothes out of landfill and offers 'a cuppa' and a slice of cake to visitors while they wait. Visit the Repair Shop on the first Saturday of every month 2-5pm at All Saints Hall, Burcot Lane, B60 1AD. For more info: 07804251731 or repaircafebromsgrove@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY hosts one-to-one Computer Sessions for people wanting to learn the basics. If you need help with emails or advice on surfing online then pop in to arrange for free tuition, provided by volunteers. They can also help with online applications for Blue Badges and bus passes. For more info call The Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

GUIDE DOGS are looking for volunteers who could give a few hours of their time to help someone locally and living with sight loss, get out and about. Volunteer sighted guides support the person they are partnered with to feel part of the community. No previous experience is necessary, full training will be provided and the role is extremely flexible! More information email MidlandsMSG@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcross-wi.wordpress.com or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7pm on the second Tuesday every month between April and November, and at 12pm December to March, at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence (01527 822622)or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

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WANT YOUR EVENT IN *THE VILLAGE*?

If you have an event, or an idea that you would like to see us feature in *The Village*, please email the details to info@villageonline.co.uk.We would love to hear about your community news and events, so please let us know.

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ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Lin Neal lin.neal@hotmail.com or alvechurch-pres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susan-barratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

FAIRFIELD WI meet at Fairfield village hall on the second Wednesday of the month at 7pm. For further details contact Carol Hine at fairfieldwi1932@gmail.com

VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

SAVE THE DATES FOR BLACKWELL

BLACKWELL FESTIVAL CHARITY has announced the dates of its 2024 events with a promise to build on last year's successes.

The free Blackwell Village Festival will take place on Saturday June 8th, with the increasingly popular Blackwell Music Festival staged on Saturday September 7th.

Charity chair Emma Westwood said volunteer organisers planned to stick to last year's successful formulae with minor finessing of just a few arrangements.

"Last year was such a success," she said "there were loads of people at the free summer festival and a sell-out crowd for the music festival. The feedback was amazingly positive and both events had a lovely, inclusive community vibe so there's really no reason to change anything much.

"But we're going to build on the successes of 2023 and create even better events for 2024," Emma added. "And we've announced the dates as early as possible because the only complaints we had last year were from people who either couldn't come or who left it too late to buy a ticket for the music festival."

More information about both events will be announced in the coming months.

THE ARK AT ST LAURENCE has a large hall and kitchen, and smaller upper room for hire, for one-off and regular hires. More information and bookings please contact Lynda on 0121 447 7955 or email admin@thearkalvechurch.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE HALL is available for hire to groups, clubs, societies, and private parties. The hall has a stage, PA system, kitchen and bar area. There is also a smaller conference room available for hire. Enquiries to the Hall Manager Andrea Ottley on 07455892909 or hallmanager.avh@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH CRICKET CLUB PAVILION is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

FAIRFIELD VILLAGE HALL is available to hire for functions, groups and parties. It has a large hall with kitchen facilities. Contact the booking secretary Andrew on 07762749943 or bookings@fvh.org.uk. See website for details www.fvh.org.uk

ROWNEY GREEN VILLAGE HALL has a large hall, with stage and sprung floor (ideal for dance and exercise) and two smaller rooms. Available for one off or regular hire, ample parking. Email: admin@rowneygreenvillagehall.org

FEATURE IN WHAT'S ON

If you have something you would like to include in our What's On listing, please get in touch.

The deadline for submissions to feature in the What's On section in the April 2024 issue of *The Village* is 10 March 2024. Please email: info@villageonline.co.uk

Club's Danny joys!

THE STREAM of Alvechurch players moving up the football pyramid continues with Danny Waldron joining National League team Southend United

Danny will never be forgotten by Alvechurch fans for the two goals he scored away at League One Cheltenham Town in the first round of last season's FA Cup causing the biggest shock of the tournament

Danny moved up a level by joining National league Rushall Olympic at the end of that season and has now moved up another level by joining Southend.

Meanwhile, Alvechurch had to bid farewell to another Danny – Danny Sweeney – who in his short time on loan from Spalding United scored a bucketful of crucial goals.

Famous victory: Danny Waldron celebrates scoring against Cheltenham Town. Picture/***Ian Macvie.***

Shooting to safety

THE SEASON is looking safe for Alvechurch FC after a run of good results and a shake-up of the league table caused by the resignation of Nuneaton Borough FC.

Church fans also now have a cup final to look forward to after the side continued their winning run in the Worcestershire Senior Cup, overcoming Redditch on penalties in the semi-final to secure a chance for silverware against Evesham United on April 10.

Back in the league, a breathless victory over visitors Stamford on a wet February Saturday afternoon as *The Village* went to press showed the resilience Alvechurch have developed.

They weren't the better side at the start of the match, but found a way into the game to score after 15 minutes and were 3-0 up soon after half time.

But within three minutes the lead was down to 3-2 and Alvechurch had to battle hard, scoring on 88 minutes, only for Stamford to bounce back again with a goal on 89 minutes.

The score remained 4-3 at the final whistle, bringing The Church their third win in five leage matches, alongside two draws.

With only three relegations from the Southern Central League to come in the summer after Nuneaton's inability to fulfil their fixtures, Alvechurch were 24pts clear of the relagation zone with ten matches of the season remaining. This comfortable mid-table position and with a cup final to look forward to, demonstrates the a tremendous turn-around in 2024 compared with the results towards the end of last year.

The management and players should be credited not only for the upturn in results but also the style of play the fans are enjoying both at Lye Meadow and on the club's travels.

■ Remember, you can now keep up with all of the men's first team games on YouTube channel @Alvechurch Matchdays

AFC FIXTURES

March

Sat 2nd	Telford United (h)	3pm
Tue 5th	Halesowen T'n (h)	7.45pm
Sat 9th	St Ives Town (h)	3pm
Sat 16th	Stourbridge (h)	3pm
Sat 23rd	Kettering Town (a)	3pm
Sat 30th	Mickleover (h)	3pm

April

Mon 1st	Halesowen Town (a)	3pm
Sat 6th	Broms Sporting (h)	3pm

Worcestershire Senior Cup final at Evesham United Wed 10th 7.45pm

Sat 13th	Coalville Town (a)	3pm
Sat 27th	St Ives Town (a)	3pm

On target: Action from the seven-goal thriller against Stamford. Picture/***Ian Macvie.***

Favourites remain

ALVECHURCH FC are delighted that both goal-keeper Ronnie Hollingshead and influential midfielder Dylan Mitchell have extended their loan spells at the club until the end of the season.

Ronnie has made a massive impression on the Alvechurch fans since his arrival, culminating in saving two penalties in the shootout against Redditch United in the Worcestershire Senior Cup semi final.

Dylan's maturity in the Alvechurch midfield belies his young age, and his dominant performances are a major reason results have improved since his arrival from Aston Villa.

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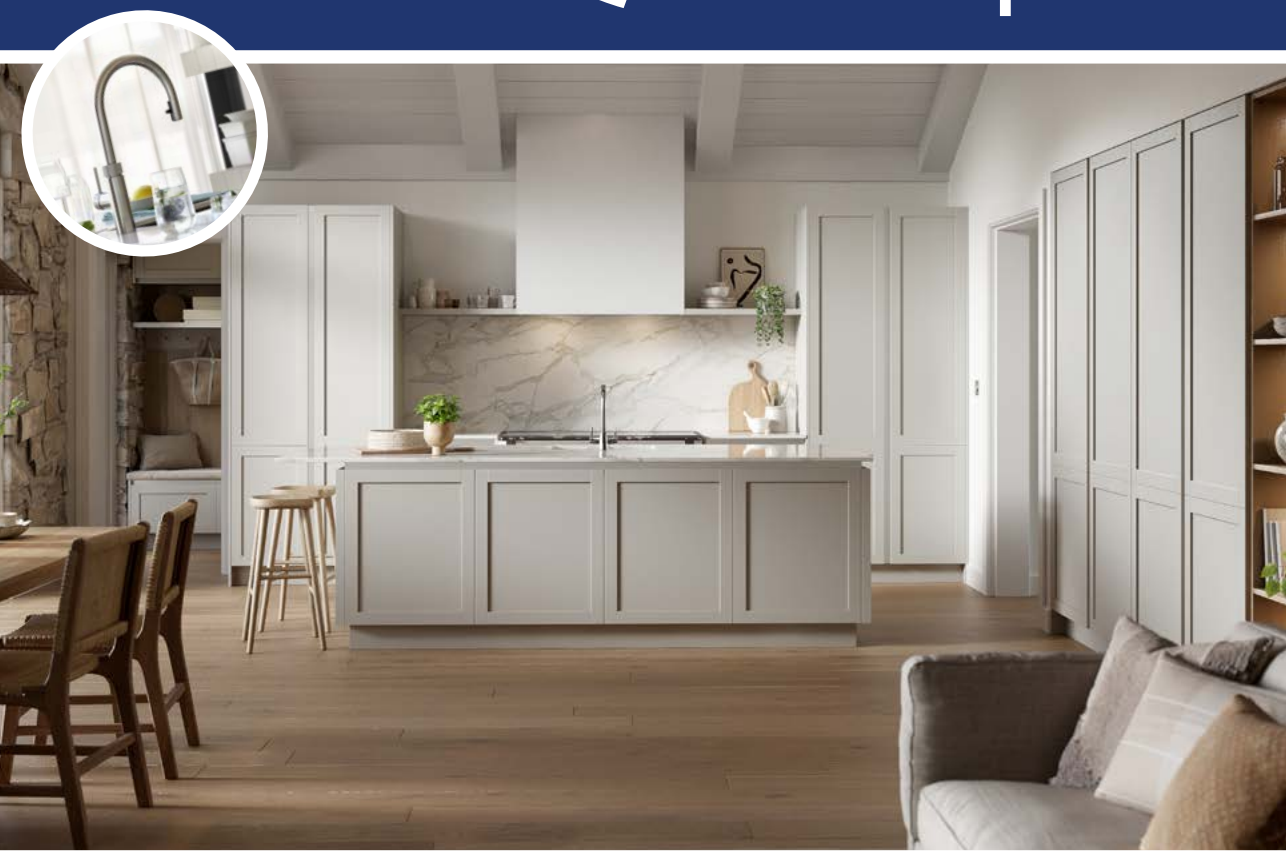

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